

Laura Renfro LMFT was the GAL assigned to my case.

My family's case had significant medical and mental health issues that were important to understand in making care decisions and establishing a parenting plan in the best interests of the children.

In this case the precise issue that I tried to have decided revolved around the deficits of my ex-spouse and their unique incompatibility with the care needs of the children ages 9 and 7, especially the youngest age 7, where the appropriate support would be critical.

At trial, Ms. Renfro provided 3 year old information regarding progressive disease states as if it were current and misled the court. She had sought and obtained a (limited) version of this health information at her entry into the case as it was relevant and important and arguably the crux of the case. This information was readily accessible, yet despite being asked to do so, over a 3 year span she chose not to expand or update it. Instead in her practice and testimony she highlighted incidental negative information about myself yet omitted negative, even documented negative information about my ex-spouse that demonstrated those concerns and a pattern of maladaptive behavior. She minimized the relevant issues, did not address the specific functional concerns, and over emphasized the irrelevant. She was selective and incomplete in what she chose to present.

This is bias.

As it turns out, my concerns regarding my ex-spouse were justified, and in fact, there were dramatic changes that had occurred and this information was knowable.

The court's decision, an outcome that relied on her testimony, placed both the children in jeopardy, and had significant adverse consequences for them.

Had a complete picture been presented by Ms. Renfro I believe the impression of the court would have been changed and the outcome would have been different. Without a doubt a fairer and more age appropriate decision would have developed.

It didn't end there. Subsequent to the trial although I had paid Ms. Renfro my portion of the court ordered fees in line with her own established payment plan, even paying more and paying early, she and her Attorney Douglas Fishman filed a baseless motion for contempt for nonpayment against me. Weeks prior to the court date although I had now provided her a check paying her in full, she held the check, did not cash it, and kept my name on the motion that included both parties, necessitating my appearance in court. I believe her objective was to make me appear equally guilty, and again soften the view of the court in relation to my ex-husband and his real nonpayment. Here there is again black and white evidence of her tactics and unprofessionalism. The manner in which she handled the post judgment payment issues is illustrative and was the manner in which she exercised her court appointed GAL authority.

Ms. Renfro neglected her duty and abused her privilege of having influence in the lives of my children, ultimately the children paid the price while she got paid; yet I had no options, no way to bring this to light, and no way to have the quality of her employment evaluated.

Some Suggestions:

Beyond the obvious need for some oversight....

Respect the need for one parent to establish boundaries with the other parent. Provide additional education.

I find my case resonates with the testimony by Dr. Steven Miller to the Task Force to Study Legal Disputes Involving the Care and Custody of Minor Children meeting at Legislative Office Building on January 9, 2014. As Per Dr. Steven Miller's testimony there needs to be a deeper understanding by the court as it relates to parental alienation, cluster B disorders and fundamental attribution errors. (Incidentally I had provided Ms. Renfro with a GAL authored article on this same topic).

Essentially what Dr. Miller stated is that what appears is not always the case. That is, the situation is reversed, the alienation occurring 180 degrees different from what you think. I include the video link here (time stamp count 5:53:38 to 6:20) for your review.

<http://www.ctn.state.ct.us/webstream.asp?odID=9782&odTitle=Task%20Force%20to%20Study%20Legal%20Disputes%20Involving%20the%20Care%20%26%20Custody%20of%20Minor%20Children%20January%209th%20Public%20Hearing&caption=true>

Some other suggestions:

Some mechanism for GAL oversight

Define the GAL role

Remove or limit GAL immunity

Have a mechanism that allows removal of GAL-there needs to be a good fit

A mechanism to ensure disclosure of relevant medical and mental health records.

A mechanism for understanding diagnoses that somehow limits the potential for bias that may exist due to the pre-established relationship between the caregiver and patient

Allow freer flowing dialogue in court / informal hearing? as opposed to being pigeon holed by the rigid question format Understand the diagnoses, understand the risks, (the judge misread and misunderstood the medical paperwork)

The best interests of the children should be paramount for all including legal counsel, if this is not feasible then a system similar to PEACE should be used to establish a Parenting plan and with legal counsel to secure court orders as necessary to enforce the plan.

If you wouldn't have a 9 year old babysit a child with life threatening condition don't establish him as a caregiver and rationalize the Disney world outcome /some limitations are what they are. Make sure the goal is on the kids, a situation may seem sympathetic but the kids should be the primary concern, are they old enough?

Keep one judge throughout the proceedings

Make the appeal process easier? Longer time to file or ability to file based on information that comes to light

Use DSS Enforcement to verify affidavits and present history of assets to the court.

Cap legal and GAL costs in divorce at a case rate

Do NOT post these judgments to the internet, or take out last names, this is an erroneous judgment and should be able to be retracted, why does this need to be this information need to be posted to the internet? Is it in part a revenue producer?

How is this posting to the internet necessary or helpful? Kids are involved, they can find this info on the net too enough so I am court ordered not to share adult issues with them but they can type in names and know the issues anyway, how does that make sense?.

What do you do with an erroneous judgment?

What does one do now, when the system was manipulated?

Investigate what I have told you here

Thank you

Karen DeVille